

APPROVED - Wheaton Redevelopment Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary – December 16, 2009
Mid-County Regional Services – 2424 Reddie Drive Wheaton, MD 20902

Members Present, Gregory J. Baker; Melissa Brown; Eleanor Duckett; Jonathan Fink; Sabrina Goris; Rahman Harrison; Zoe Lefkowitz; Chris Lindsay, Thomas Martin; Susan Petersen; Morey Rothberg, Dave Taghipour and Fran Ware

Members Absent: Mara Baer; Elizabeth Boyle; Maureen Carrington; Manuel Hidalgo; Filippo Leo; Diane Lynne; Erin Roberts; and Robert Schilke

County Staff Present: Gary Stith; Rob Klein; Pete McGinnity; Sharon Lasswell; Natalie Cantor and Sidney Cooper

Meeting Called to Order by Chairperson Greg Baker at 7:03 p.m.

Approval of Minutes – November minutes were unanimously approved.

Marketing Update – Sidney Cooper

- Handed out gift bags; talked about local first; flea market, its continuation and possible participants; and encouraged turn key projects.

Safeway (Patriot Realty Project) – Petersen/Klein

The Urban Design Subcommittee met with Safeway and discussed various comments and questions.

- The committee had concerns about moving the Safeway closer to Georgia Avenue.
- Safeway is giving consideration to a possible entrance into the Safeway from Fern Street.
- The store will close on December 19, 2009 due to structural problems that would cost a significant amount of money. Demolition of the existing building will probably be in late 2010, if they have approvals to move forward. They hope to bring the preliminary plan to the Planning Board in February. This would be a time to show WRAC's support for the project. At the time of site plan, the WRAC would have an opportunity to comment on the design of the project. Their aggressive plan is to have all permits by 2010 and open in 2012.
- The Urban Design Subcommittee voted to give the WRAC Chair authority to write a letter to the Planning Board in January in support of the Safeway project in concept.

City Vista Safeway Tour – December 11th and attended by Fink, Rothberg, Klein and McGinnity

- The project seems to have improved the rather run down neighborhood – it was impressive.
- The mixed-use project has condos and apartments with a 97% occupancy.
- City Vista has both rentals and sales in its residential units.
- Safeway has exceeded their expectations of what they would be getting.
- The store is very attractive, well laid out and well lit.
- Garage lighting for the store was nice, but garage lighting for the residents was not adequate.
- It's hard to see the residential entrance.
- The loading dock is in the back; it's large, really sticks out and is very unattractive from the back. What will Wheaton Safeway project look like from the back and Fern Street side?

MOTION – was made by Ms. Petersen and seconded to write a letter to the Planning Board in January in support of the Safeway project in concept. All were in favor. Motion passed.

Sector Plan Update – Martin/Stith and comments from committee members and staff.

- Sector Plan Work Group met on November 2nd and primarily discussed the testimony from the previous Planning Board meeting. Both WRP staff and WRAC Chair testified in support of M-NCPPC staff recommendations. The Work Group felt there was a good representation at the Planning Board meeting. The Planning Board approved the Preliminary Staff Report.
- WRAC’s testimony before the Planning Board covered five major areas:
 - concurrence with the removal of the Retail Preservation Overlay Zone;
 - supports rezoning of Westfield Wheaton Mall;
 - supports implementation of University Boulevard Bus Rapid Transit Alignment;
 - concurs that the preliminary draft of the Sector Plan take no position on the relocation of the Wheaton Library; and
 - supports consideration of Crossway Community, Inc. as a likely site for a new elementary school.
- At the Planning Board meeting, Mr. Hanson questioned Wheaton’s Central Business District status. Staff feels it may deal more with the CR Zone and Commercial Residential Zone. Staff will meet with M-NCPPC’s staff to discuss. At the hearing, a Planning Board member asked Mr. Baker if there were any policy or tools that WRAC would support to keep small businesses in Wheaton once the Overlay Zone is gone. Economic Development has already prepared a “tool box” of tools established to assist small businesses. The Economic Development Subcommittee is trying to identify the potential problems that are confronting small businesses. M-NCPPC staff’s presentation changed some from their written memo – they didn’t want to link the BRT to a particular roadway at this point pending analysis; and they seem to have changed their stance on school location.
- You can listen to the hearing on the M-NCPPC website;
- The Sector Plan Work Group’s next meet will be February 1st, which is after the Preliminary Sector Plan is release in mid-January.
- Mr. Stith expressed real concern about changing Wheaton’s current designation as a Central Business District (CBD) to a CR Zone. He feels it’s the wrong message to send to the community, developers and businesses. The new CR Zone has not been adopted yet and is being designed to implement the White Flint Sector Plan.
- The CR Zone keeps changing and has never been tested to see how or if it works.
- Maybe the CBD should be expanded to include the intersection at University and Veirs Mill Road instead of applying the CR Zone to that area.

ULI Technical Assistance Report – Stith

The final draft should be published in time for the WRAC January meeting and it will be available on line. Mr. Stith provided a handout and gave a brief overview of their findings:

- Market Potential – multi-family development, young professionals & families, value anchors, mid-level chain restaurants, live music venue, international grocer and increased medical offices;
- Planning & Design – potential development framework, districting strategy and increase green connections, build to street edge and transportation;
- Development Strategies – create districts, music and entertainment, phasing districts to market and sequence of development;
- Implementation – RFQ strategy, build on strengths and programming.

Redevelopment Report/RFQ – Stith

- At the site of the First Baptist Church on Georgia Avenue, Washington Property Company is resuming the process of rezoning their 2.4 acre site to proceed with a 225 multi-family residential project. They have asked to come to the January Economic Development Subcommittee meeting and the February WRAC meeting. M-NCPPC staff and management have encouraged them to proceed and not wait until the Sector Plan is finished. The Church is moving to Olney.
- The RFQ will be issued on January 4, 2010 and posted on the County's website.
- A one page summary of the RFQ with the URL will be done for the development community and consultants as well as other interested parties.

Mr. Stith briefed the WRAC on the contents of the RFQ:

- goals (developed through WRAC) and what the County wants to accomplish;
- looking to make Wheaton a destination in this region;
- attract and integrate new development into Wheaton;
- build on Wheaton's attributes of existing business and residential neighborhoods;
- create a vibrant community that is economically and environmentally sustainable where residents want to live, work and play;
- also included specific objectives developed with WRAC's assistance;
- includes Wheaton's history and the County's economic incentives i.e. Enterprise Zone or an Arts and Entertainment District;
- all this provides information on what the public sector side has to offer; and
- all public land in Wheaton is being included in the RFQ for potential joint public/private partnership (6 parking district properties, the Mid-County Regional Center property, and through a Memorandum of Understanding - the WMATA bus bay area and parking garage; as well as M-NCPPC's property at Veteran's Park; -- if redeveloped, most of these properties will have to be replaced.

Mr. Stith briefed the WRAC on the RFQ process.

- The RFQ will be issued on January 4, 2010 – submission deadline is March 4, 2010.
- The County will review the submissions, evaluate their qualifications and develop a short-list.
- Additional information and financials will be asked for.
- An interview panel will be selected (7 or 9 members -- 1 from M-NCPPC and the rest - half from WMATA and half from the County).
- Interviews will be conducted and a master developer will be selected.
- A letter of intent will be done with that developer, with input from the WRAC.
- A development concept will be drafted (developer will bring in their design team and what they think the market will support and the team will work with the community on a project and design concept).
- A final development agreement will be drafted and signed.

County staff was asked how to respond to neighbors that feel the County wants all the density in Wheaton. The County's response was -- other areas are increasing their density i.e. White Flint, Gaithersburg, Kensington, Takoma-Langley and an urban village will be built around the Shady Grove Metro Station. The County is pushing to upgrade the density around transit services. When density occurs, car trips decrease. The vehicle mile travel per person in Chevy Chase-Friendship Heights area is actually lower than anywhere else in the region, except for Washington D.C.

Page 4

Follow-up on Thank You Letters to Elected Officials – Baker

ACTION ITEM - It was mentioned in the letters mailed to Elected Officials that the County will provide them a monthly updated on Wheaton's progress (Redevelopment Director's Report following the monthly WRAC meetings). That will begin with this month's report.

Sustainable Work Group Report – Klein

- The Sustainable Work Group is working with the Urban District on a “rainscape garden” to be located on the grass area next to Lot 13.
- They will provide a letter to WRAC indicating their recommendations for “green Wheaton” to be considered in the Sector Plan.
- They have been working with University of Maryland Urban Design graduate students. They had trouble surveying restaurants – only about 8 out of 35 restaurants participated – and even that was a lot of work.
- At the Chair's request, they have been added to the email list to receive WRAC information.

Avalon Bay – Klein

They are doing their assessment and will get back to the County after the first of the year. They have 20+ properties in their portfolio. The threshold in financing has changed and Wheaton is more questionable. They are looking at what their alternatives i.e. sell the property, fix it up and even the RFQ process. At this point they are down from 60,000 square-feet to 13,000 square-feet of commercial space. This did have a big impact; however Safeway not being in the project is not what put it into question.

Meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.